

This Sermon Delivered By
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Roswell Presbyterian Church
Roswell, GA Palm Sunday, April 1, 2007

“Even Some Leftovers!”
II Kings 4:42-44; John 6:1-14

Many of you know that on Palm Sunday it has become something of a tradition of mine that I preach a first person sermon, in other words, I deliver the sermon as if I were someone else. I'm not sure how it became a tradition. I started doing this back in Vicksburg, before I came to Roswell thirteen years ago, and I suppose I carried this tradition with me to this congregation. The first character I ever took on was Barabbas, the man who was freed when Jesus was arrested and crucified.

Over the years I have been Pontius Pilate, I have been Joseph of Arimathea, I have been one of the merchants Jesus drove from the temple. I've played a number of different roles. This year I am going to assume the role of the little boy who shared his lunch with the disciple Andrew when Jesus fed the 5000. However, in the scenario I have created, it is some years later and this little boy has now grown to be a man.

Now, as I tell you every year, I want to make sure you know that the scene I have created, the words I am going to speak, are purely fictional. They are the products of my imagination. We have no reason to believe this conversation ever actually occurred. In fact, we know virtually nothing about the boy, except that he shared his food and Jesus used it to feed thousands of people.

So please be clear. The words, the setting, are my creation. My prayer, and my hope, is that through these fictional words, the true word of God will ring through. My prayer is that we will hear the good news of God, a God who in the person of Jesus Christ came into this world, and on Palm Sunday entered into Jerusalem to begin a week that has changed the course of history.

The scene I have created is some thirty years after the death of Jesus. The young boy, now a mature man, is talking with a friend named Simeon, sharing with him his memories of that famous day and telling him some of the things that have happened to him since then. Remember, the words, the setting, are my imagination. I pray the message will be the good news God has for us this day.

Let's listen first to the account of the feeding of the 5000 from the gospel of John, and then listen as that young boy, now grown to be a man, talks with his friend, Simeon. Listen now to the Word of our Lord.

-- Read John: 6:1-14 --

Oh, you've heard that story before. Yes, yes, that was me. I was that little boy. It's been years now, hasn't it. But I remember it as if it were yesterday.

We didn't know much about Jesus at the time. All I knew was that the men at synagogue were talking about this new rabbi who was traveling around teaching and healing people. That was the part I wanted to see. They said blind people were being given their sight, and lame people were being made to walk. I wanted to see that.

So I convinced my parents to let me go. Crowds of people were heading out toward the lake to hear Jesus. That's where he was staying with his followers. My mother insisted that I take some food with me. So I did. It wasn't much. Two dried fish, five barley loaves.

You can't believe the crowd that was out there that day. Thousands of people. It was the biggest crowd I had ever seen. I pushed my way up through the people so that I could see what was going on. I have to admit, at first I was a little disappointed. Jesus wasn't really putting on much of a show that day. In fact, he didn't heal anyone that I could see.

But he did talk, and I have to admit, it caught me off guard. He said things I had never heard anyone say. He talked about loving your enemies, and praying for those who are out to get you. He said loving each other was the most important law we could ever follow. And he told the most amazing stories, which I have to admit, kept me spellbound.

After we had been there for hours, I was starting to get hungry. We were taking a break, and people were gathering in groups talking about all they had heard that day. I snuck off to the side to try to eat the food my mother had sent me. I'll be honest, I really didn't want others to see me. It looked like I was the only one who had brought anything to eat, and I was hungry. I certainly didn't have enough to feed others.

About that time one of Jesus' disciples saw me getting ready to eat, and he asked me to come with him. It startled me, but he didn't seem to give me any choice, so I went with him.

Simeon, you won't believe it, but he took me up to meet Jesus. I was shaking I was so nervous. And with this incredibly calm voice Jesus asked me for my food. I really didn't know what to do. Selfishly, I wanted to eat it myself. I was hungry, and my mother gave it to me. If these other people didn't have mothers who looked out for them, well, that was their problem, not mine.

But this was Jesus who wanted my food, so I gave it to him. What else could I do?

But you know what happened. He began to pray, and as he did, a hush began to fall over all the people. Thousands began to stop and listen. At the end of his prayer, he took the food, broke it into pieces, and began to pass it around.

I can't really tell you what happened next, or at least how it happened, but it was the most amazing thing I have ever seen. People began to eat, and the followers of Jesus kept on passing the food around, and the more people ate, the more food there was to pass around, and when people were stuffed with food, they filled up twelve baskets with the leftovers.

To this day I can't explain it. But I can tell you, Simeon, it really happened. I watched it happen. I may not have seen any blind people get their sight, but I saw five thousand people have their stomachs filled, and it was the most amazing thing I have ever seen in all my life.

I ran home and told my father about what had happened, and he reminded me of a story from the Scriptures which I have to admit I had forgotten. It was about the prophet Elisha, and about that time that one hundred of Elisha's men were hungry.

He called for food, and was brought was barely enough to feed a small portion of them, but through a miracle of God, Elisha passed out the food and the people were filled and there were even leftovers.

I remember telling my father, "I remember that story, but father, Jesus fed thousands with just my lunch. It was like what Elisha had done, but Jesus did so much more."

I couldn't get that story out of my mind. To be honest, I've never forgotten it. But things did die down a bit after that. Jesus moved on, and I went back to routine of school and chores. A few months later my father told me that we were going to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover. We had done that before, but we really didn't have the money to make that journey every year, so I was really excited that we were going this year.

We made the journey down to Jerusalem with others from our area, and like most of the Galileans, we set our camp outside the city walls, near an area they called the Mount of Olives.

It was a week or so before the actual Passover, and on the second day we were there I was excited to find out that Jesus was actually staying nearby. In fact, there was real excitement this one morning when the word was out that Jesus was going to enter the city and go to the Temple. It was a Sunday morning, I remember it well.

It had the same feel as the day I went out to hear Jesus teach. Crowds were buzzing all around, and people were beginning to line the streets. I couldn't see Jesus yet, but people were cutting branches out of the trees to wave at him and they were lining the road with them.

What was really exciting was that people were saying this was the Messiah. They were shouting "Hosanna," "save us." They were comparing him to David, the greatest king in all our history. I remember wondering at the time whether or not the Romans had any idea what was going on. I wondered if they knew that pretty soon this Jesus would drive them out of the city.

After all, there was no doubt he could do it. I knew first hand, and I told everyone who would listen. "I've seen Jesus feed thousands with just a small amount of food. I can't wait to see what he'll do to the Romans with all of us fighting for him."

I could tell he was getting closer, and I expected to see him march in with his followers all around him. I imagined they had swords and spears and were ready to take on the Romans. The Romans may have been strong and fierce, but we had Jesus on our side.

But about then he came around the corner, and it wasn't at all what I expected. There was no army, no swords, no spears. Just Jesus, riding on a donkey. And even though everyone was shouting his name, he didn't look like the king I was expecting. I have to admit, I was excited and disappointed all at the same time.

Apparently others were as well, because as the week went on the crowd grew more and more upset with Jesus. It was obvious he wasn't going to drive out the Romans. And after all, that's what we needed. Or at least that's what we thought we needed.

By Thursday the crowd had turned against him, and that night they had him arrested by the Romans. Within hours he was led off to be executed. I went to see that as well. This was now the third time I had seen him. And it was by far the most troubling.

I was amazed when he fed the thousands. I was excited when he entered the city and we called him our king. But I was confused when I watched them take him off to die.

He had every right to be angry and upset. After all, even my father had told me that he hadn't done anything wrong. But they were killing him. It didn't seem right. Even as a young boy, I knew something wasn't right. This man, who had taught us to love and to forgive and to serve and to care, this man who seemed so good, was being taunted and ridiculed and tortured. Even to me I knew it wasn't right.

And what was amazing was the look in his face. As he went by me our eyes caught each other. I thought for moment that he remembered me from months earlier when I had given him my lunch. I don't know. However, I do know that his eyes were filled with compassion and a love that I had never seen. He should have been angry, but he was filled with love. I couldn't understand it.

My father made us leave town that next morning. Even though it was the Sabbath, and Passover, for that matter, he was worried for our safety. Things were in turmoil. So he made us leave.

At the time I really didn't know what happened next, although several years later people began coming to our village telling us that the very next day, they went to the tomb of Jesus and found it empty. Word began to spread that his body had been kidnapped, but then others began to say that they had actually seen him, and that God had brought him back to life.

It has been years since I first heard those stories of Jesus coming back to life, and I have to admit, when I first heard them, I had a hard time believing them. But then I started watching the lives of people around me, people who did believe the story, people were called themselves followers of this risen Lord.

And when I looked around, I saw people whose lives had been changed. I saw people who had faced trials and hardships, and they weren't bitter or angry. I saw groups of people who had every reason to be mad at each other, and instead they called each other sister and brother. I saw people who normally had been stingy and greedy, and they shared, and they gave, and they went out of their way to help other people.

I started asking people why they acted this way, and over and over I heard the same thing. Jesus, they said. Jesus has changed my life.

Oh Simeon, I can't really explain it all to you. I have to admit, there is a lot I don't understand. I only know this. Years ago, when I saw him hanging on that cross, I thought it was the end. The dreams I had of victory over the Romans were coming to an end.

But since then, I've realized that he did something even more powerful than defeating the Romans. He defeated the pain and the hurt and the anger and the bitterness of this world.

Years ago, Simeon, I had the opportunity to give him my lunch. I thought it was a pretty big deal, and in fact, I was pretty proud of myself. I had made a real sacrifice. I gave him my lunch.

But it pales in comparison to the sacrifice he made. He gave his life, Simeon. He didn't have to die, but there he was, hanging on a cross, and even though I didn't understand it at the time, I now realize he gave his life so I could experience real life. He loved me so that I could know what real love is all about. He forgave those who shouted at him so that we could know what forgiveness really means. And he even came back from the grave to promise that we would come back from the grave as well.

All I did was give him my lunch, and I thought that was a pretty big deal. But he gave his life, and I've seen in the people around me. It has transformed who they are. It has made all the difference in the world.

They've invited me to come and be one of his followers. They say I need to give him my life. I'm a little nervous about that Simeon. I'm not sure what that will mean for me. If I give him my life, will I lose my life in the process? I've been wondering about that.

But last night, all night long, all I could think about was that day in Galilee, when I gave him my lunch. I remember then being afraid that if I gave him my lunch, I would end up hungry. Instead, I was stuffed with food and so were all the people around me.

I gave him my lunch, and I ended up with nothing to fear. And now, Simeon, I'm being asked to give him my life. Why should I be afraid this time? He's done so much for us all. He's changed people's lives. He's brought hope and joy. He's brought forgiveness and replaced anger with love and bitterness with peace.

Come with me Simeon. Let him change your life, as well. I trusted him with my lunch, and it was the most amazing decision I ever made. Let's trust him with our lives and see what comes next. I can only imagine what amazing things he has in store for us.

He filled me then, and he'll fill us again. I'm sure of it. Only this time, he'll fill us with his love. Let's go see, Simeon. Let's go find out. AMEN.